

Locality Guide - Jewish Research in New York City

Historical Background

Between 1880 and 1925, 2.8 million Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews immigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States.¹ Ninety-four percent (94%) of these Jewish immigrants came from Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. This area of Europe is known as the Pale of Settlement.² By 1920, Jews made up 50% of all European immigrants coming to the United States. The Ashkenazi Jews “clustered in New York City, [and] created the garment industry which supplied the dry good stores across the country.”³ The new Jewish immigrants “quickly created support networks consisting of many small synagogues and Ashkenazi Landsmanshaftn for Jews of the same town or village.”⁴

Repositories

The Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at the Center for Jewish History

15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011

Telephone: 917-608-8217

Hours: Monday-Thursday: 9:30– 4:30pm – Walk-ins are permitted, though appointments are recommended.

Email: inquiries@cjh.org. The average response time for inquiries sent via email is 1-2 weeks.

Public transportation: 4, 5, 6, L, N, Q, R trains to the 14th Street and Union Square station.

1, 2, and 3 trains to the 14th and 7th Avenue station.

M1, M2, and M# buses from Fifth Avenue to 17th Street

M7 and M55 buses from Sixth Avenue to 15th Street.

M14 bus from 14th Street to 5th Avenue.

Discounted parking is offered at the SP+Parking at 20 East 16th Street between 5th Avenue and Union Square West (\$30.00 – maximum of 8 hours) Download coupon here:

<https://promo.parking.com/center-for-jewish-history-parking-special/>

A research account is required to make appointments and request materials. To create a personal research account visit <https://libraryservices.cjh.org/aeon/>.

¹ Ashkenazi Jews are Yiddish-speaking Jews who originated from Eastern Europe. See “Jewish Glossary,” *FamilySearch Wiki* (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Jewish_Glossary : accessed 15 March 2023).

² Ibid. “The Pale of Settlement is the Western area of the Russian Empire where Jews were legally allowed to live. It began with the first partition of Poland in 1772 and existed until World War I.”

³ “History of the Jews in the United States,” *Wikipedia* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_States : accessed 15 March 2023).

⁴ Ibid. See footnote 10 for a discussion of the landsmanshaftn.

Resources available at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute include:⁵

- The Reading Room has an open-stack reference collection that includes how-to books, name dictionaries, gazetteers, historical atlases, guides to translating vital records, and newsletters of Jewish genealogical societies.
- The collections of the five partner institutions,⁶ which include family histories, memoirs, newspapers, correspondence and personal papers. A significant portion of the genealogy resources within the partner collections are either rare or unique to the center. These collections consist of over 500,00 volumes in multiple languages for many time periods, as well as over 100 million documents, including organizational records and personal papers, photographs, multimedia recordings, poster, art, and artifacts.
- 2,000 microfilms and microfiches (on-long term loan) from the Church of Latter-Day Saints FamilySearch Library. Most microfilms and microfiches predominantly contain records from Eastern and Central Europe. An inventory of the LDS microfilms and microfiche can be viewed at <https://jgsny.org/index.php/ny-area-research/ackman-ziff/lds-films>.⁷
- Approximately 22,000 photographs, including 8,000 portraits. Most photographs can also be viewed online.
- 45-minute one-on-one Zoom with a Librarian to received suggestions for next steps on patron's research.

To search the online catalog for the Center for Jewish History Collections go to <https://search.cjh.org/primo-explore/search?vid=beta>.

New York Public Library – Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy

Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, First Floor, Room 121
New York, NY 10018

Telephone: 212-930-0828

Email: history@nypl.org

Hours: Monday–Wednesday, 10:00 a.m.–7:45 p.m.; Thursday–Saturday, 10:11 a.m.–5:45 p.m.

Public transportation: N, Q, R, W, and 1, 2, 3 trains to Times Square/42nd Street; B, D, E, and F trains to 42nd Street/Bryant Park

M5 bus along Fifth Avenue to W. 41st Street

A New York Public Library card is required to make an appointment and reserve materials.

To apply for a library card: <https://www.nypl.org/library-card/new>

To make an appointment: <https://libcal.nypl.org/reserve/lhg/121>

National Archives at New York City

⁵ “About the Institute,” *Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute* (<https://genealogy.cjh.org/about> : accessed 15 March 2023).

⁶ The five distinguished partner organizations are the American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

⁷ All FHL films at the Institute have been digitized, but most have not been indexed.

One Bowling Green, Room 328, New York, NY 10004

Telephone: 212-401-1620

Email: newyork.archives@nara.gov

Website: <https://www.archives.gov/nyc>

Hours: Monday-Friday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Research visits are by appointment only.

Public transportation: 2 and 3 trains to Wall Street; 5 train to Bowling Green, R train to Whitehall Street.

Of interest to researchers doing New York City Jewish research would be the naturalization records and passenger arrival lists.

New York City FamilySearch Center

125 Columbus Avenue (Columbus and 65th), New York, NY 10023

Telephone: 212-799-2414

Email: ny_newyorkcity@familyhistorymail.org

Hours: Tuesday – Thursday, 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Closed first Saturday of April and October.

Public transportation: 1, 2, 3 trains to W. 65th Street and Broadway.

M65 bus to 65th Street and Columbus, M5 bus to Broadway and W. 66th Street

Website:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/New_York_City_New_York_FamilySearch_Center

To schedule a 20-minute online research strategy consultation with FamilySearch go to:

<https://go.oncehub.com/ResearchStrategySession>. Researchers can schedule a session with a consultant to discuss “Jewish Ancestors in Eastern Europe.”

Online Databases / Digital Collections

JewishGen – The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy – <https://www.jewishgen.org>

JewishGen Databases – <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/>. List of 40+ databases on the JewishGen website.

JewishGen Ukraine Database – <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Ukraine/>. JewishGen recently announced the addition of 150,000 new records added to their website on JewishGen.org. They have the goal of adding one million new records by July.⁸

JewishGen Yizkor Book Translations Database <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/translations/>.

The database includes links to yizkor books that have been translated or partially translated into English.

Jewish Genealogical Society – Brooklyn Naturalizations 1907-1924

⁸ “The Weekly Nosh,” *JewishGen*, 32 (13 March 2023); digital image (<https://mailchi.mp/jewishgen/noshi1031-329945?e=2883eb0294> : accessed 13 March 2023).

<https://jgsny.org/searchable-databases/brooklyn-naturalizations>

Jewish Genealogical Society - Burial Society Database Project – <https://jgsny.org/searchable-databases/burial-society-databases>. The project began in 1989 and attempts to identify the names and cemetery locations of all Jewish burial society plots in the New York Metropolitan area. The database contains 10,200 entries from almost 100 cemeteries located in New York City, Long Island, Putnam County, Westchester County, and northern New Jersey.

NARA – Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Russians to the United States, documenting the period 1834–1897 – <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/fielded-search.jsp?dt=2126&tf=F&cat=GP44&bc=,sl>. This series consists of records of 527,394 passengers who arrived at the United States between 1834 through 1897 and identified their country of origin or nationality as Armenia, Finland, Galicia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Russian Poles, or Ukraine. The bulk of the records are for passengers arriving at the Port of New York.

NARA – Frequently Asked Questions for Data Files Relating to the Immigration of Russians to the United States, 1834–1897

https://aad.archives.gov/aad/content/aad_docs/dmg_cir_immigrant_russian_faqs.pdf, updated 28 May 2020.

New York, New York City Police Census, 1890

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2381996>. The census produced 1,008 books and enumerated 13% more residents than the 1890 U.S. census.⁹ 894 books survive and have been indexed and are on *FamilySearch*. The collection is also available on Ancestry at <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3519/>.

New York Times (1815–2019) w/ Index – <https://www.nypl.org/research/collections/articles-databases/new-york-times-1851-2019-w-index>. On-site access only, available at all branch libraries, and the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building.

Online Resources

Avotaynu Online – Research into the Origins and Migrations of the Jewish People

<https://avotaynuonline.com/about-us/>. Avotaynu Online is the main sponsor of the Jewish DNA collection effort.

Avotanye Online: Exploring Cemeteries and Byways in Ukraine

<https://avotaynuonline.com/2010/07/exploring-cemeteries-and-byways-in-ukraine-by-harriet-kasow/> (July 2010)

Center for Jewish History Genealogy Research Guides

⁹ “About the New York Police Census, 1890,” *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3519/>): accessed 22 March 2023).

<https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Resources at the Center for Jewish History
https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/cjh_resources (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Resources at the Center for Jewish History – NYC Orphanage Records
https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/cjh_resources/ajhs/nyc_orphanage (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Researching Your Ancestral Town
https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/researching_ancestral_town (May 2021)

Genealogy Guide: Belarus – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/belarus> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Galicia – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/galicia> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Jewish Names – https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/jewish_names (May 2021)

Genealogy Guide: Landsmanshaftn Records
https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/landsmanshaftn/additional_resources (November 2022). Landsmanshaft (plural is landsmanshaftn) is a Yiddish word meaning a mutual aid society, benefit society, or hometown society of Jewish immigrants from the same European town or region.”¹⁰

Genealogy Guide: Lithuania – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/lithuania> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Maps – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/maps> (November 2022)

Research Guide: Poland – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/poland> (November 2022)

¹⁰ “Landsmanshaft,” *Wikipedia* (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landsmanshaft> : accessed 20 March 2023). Landsmanshaftn are societies formed by Jewish immigrants from the same villages, towns and cities, primarily in Eastern Europe. They became the dominant form of Jewish social organization in the late 19th century and continued to function as such well into the 20th century. These societies provided financial assistance as well as medical care and burial assistance. “Each landsmanshaft had a chevra kadisha (burial society), whose responsibility it was to purchase and maintain the society’s burial plots. A survey in 1938 by the Yiddish Writers Group of the WPA identified 2,468 landsmanshaftn in New York City, though the number was probably much higher.” Most records are handwritten in Yiddish and English. Learning the name of an ancestor’s landsmanshaft can be helpful in identifying the home village of the immigrating ancestor as most landsmanshaft societies included the name of the village of its members in the society name. Knowing the name of the landsmanshaft society an ancestor belonged to will also help the researcher identify the cemetery and gravesite where the ancestor is buried. “Genealogy Guide: Landsmanshaftn Records,” *Center for Jewish History* (<https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/landsmanshaftn/intro> : accessed 15 March 2023).

Genealogy Guide: Romania and Moldova

https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/romania_moldova (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Ukraine – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/ukraine> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: United States Synagogue Records

https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/us_synagogues (September 2021)

Genealogy Guide: World War I Resources at the Center for Jewish History

<https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/wwi> (November 2022)

Genealogy Guide: Yizkor Books – <https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/yizkor>. Yizkor books are memorial books that recollect Eastern European Jewish communities and were typically created by landsmanshaftn after the Holocaust.¹¹ Usually written in Yiddish or Hebrew, they often contain personal narratives, photographs, and maps.¹² Yizkor books are accessed by the name of the community.

Research Guides for the Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy – <https://libguides.nypl.org/nyplmilstein>

Research Guide: Genealogy: Getting Started at the New York Public Library

<https://libguides.nypl.org/genealogy/gettingstarted>

Research Guide: Images of Our Ancestors – <https://libguides.nypl.org/imagesofourancestors> (March 2023)

Research Guide: Introductions to Polish Genealogy

<https://libguides.nypl.org/c.php?g=1112391&p=8110471> (March 2023)

Research Guide: Local History and Genealogy Research at NYPL

<https://libguides.nypl.org/genealogyguides> (January 2023)

Research Guide: New York City Neighborhood Research

<https://libguides.nypl.org/neighborhoodresearch> (January 2023)

Research Guide: Yizkor Books – <https://libguides.nypl.org/yizkorbooks>. 650 of the 700 yizkor books at the New York Public Library are digitized and online. These images can be found at the

¹¹ “Genealogy Guide: Yizkor Books,” *Center for Jewish History* (<https://libguides.cjh.org/genealogyguides/yizkor> : accessed 23 March 2023).

¹² Ibid.

Yizkor Book Collection <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/yizkor-book-collection#/?tab=navigation>, and at the Yiddish Book Center <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yizkor-books>, where they can be viewed and purchased. Some books have been translated into English.

Photographic Collections at the New York Public Library - <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org>. The collection includes photographic views of New York City, 1870s–1970s.

The Gesher Galicia Map Room - <https://maps.geshergalicia.org>

“Jewish Genealogy Research,” *FamilySearch Wiki* (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Jewish_Genealogy_Research), last edited 5 October 2022.

NARA – Finding Aid for Naturalization Records at the National Archives at New York City <https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/naturalization-records#local>. Records can now be ordered online.

NARA – Finding Aid for Passenger Arrival Lists at the National Archives at New York City <https://www.archives.gov/nyc/finding-aids/passenger-lists.html>

Webinar: Jewish Genealogy 101 – <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/video/jewish-genealogy-101> (March 2020)

Webinar: Jewish Gravestone and the Internet: A Researcher’s Guide to New York City <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/video/jewish-gravestones-and-internet-researcher’s-guide-new-york-city> (March 2023)

Webinar: Onsite Research in New York City <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/video/onsite-research-new-york> (January 2023)

RootsTech: Tracing Your Jewish Roots in Ukraine <https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/tracing-your-jewish-roots-in-ukraine> (2023)

RootsTech: Genealogical Research in Eastern Ukraine Using Russian Empire Records <https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/research-in-eastern-ukraine-using-russian-empire-records> (2023)

RootsTech: Genealogical Research in Galicia <https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/genealogical-research-in-galicia> (2023)

RootsTech: Using Maps and Gazetteers to Locate the Hometown <https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/using-maps-and-gazetteers-to-locate-the-hometown> (2023)

RootsTech: Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/getting-started-in-jewish-genealogy> (2023)

RootsTech: Making Sense of Alphabet Soup – IAIGS / JGSLI / JG / SIG / RD

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/making-sense-of-alphabet-soup-iaigs-jgsli-jg-sig-rd> (2023)

RootsTech: Using a JewishGen or JRI-Poland Index to Locate the Original on FamilySearch

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/using-a-jewishgen-or-jri-poland-index-to-locate-the-original-on-familysearch> (2023)

RootsTech: Jewish Gravestones Deciphered

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/jewish-gravestones-deciphered> (2022)

RootsTech: Jewish Surnames & Patronymics

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/jewish-surnames-patronymics> (2022)

RootsTech: Jewish Headstones: Seven Popular Symbols

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/jewish-headstones-seven-popular-symbols> (2022)

RootsTech: The Jewish Records Collection on Ancestry / Ancestry®

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/6-1-the-jewish-records-collection-on-ancestry-ancestry> (2022)

RootsTech: Discover Your Eastern European Jewish Ancestors / Ancestry Extra / Ancestry®

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/discover-your-eastern-european-jewish-ancestors-ancestry-extra-ancestry> (2022)

RootsTech: Town Counsel: Finding Your Jewish Ancestor's European Origin

<https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/town-counsel-finding-your-jewish-ancestors-european-origin> (2022)

Societies

Jewish Genealogical Society - <https://jgsny.org>

Mailing address: Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc., PO box 631, New York, NY 10113-0631

Email: info@jgsny.org

Membership cost is \$40.00 for an individual per year and \$54.00 for a family per year.

Databases available on the JGSNY website:

- Brooklyn Naturalizations - 235,000+ Name index to Brooklyn (King County) naturalization records

- The JGSNY Burial Society Database Project - Searchable database of the names and cemetery locations of all Jewish burial society (landmanshaftn) plots in the New York metropolitan area
- Indexes of Landmanshaftn records for YIVO, WPA records, Jewish Communal Register, and the American Jewish Year Book.
- Indexes to Jewish Organizations.

The use of the databases is free to everyone.

New York Genealogical and Biographical Society - <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org>

36 West 44th Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-755-8532

Membership is required to search their databases. Membership cost is \$77.00 for an individual per year and \$115.00 for a family per year.

The physical collections of the NYG&B are now maintained by the New York Public Library at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. The New York Public Library's online catalog allows researchers to locate the materials that are part of the NYG&B's collections.

Email: membership@nygbs.org

Published Sources

Alexander Beider, *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, revised edition (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 2008)

Alexander Beider, *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia* (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 2004).

Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

Estelle M. Guzik, *Genealogical Resources in New York*, revised edition (New York Genealogical Society, Inc.: New York, 2003).

Gary Mokotoff, Sallyann Amdur Sack, Alexander Sharon, *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*, revised edition (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 2002).

Hannah Kliger, *Jewish Hometown Associations and Family Circles in New York: The WPA Yiddish Writers' Group Study*, (Bloomington, IN: University Press, 1992).

Jewish Genealogy Research Outline, (Salt Lake City: Family History Library, 2000); digital image, *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/2/24/Jewish_Genealogy_Research_Outline.pdf).

Nolan Menachemson, *A Practical Guide to Jewish Cemeteries* (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2007).

Social Media

Facebook page for Jewish Genealogical Society-New York (JGSNY) is found at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/62112838856>.

Facebook page for the Center for Jewish History is found at

<https://www.facebook.com/centerforjewishhistory/>

Facebook page for the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research is found at

<https://www.facebook.com/YIVOInstitute>

The Center for Jewish History is on YouTube at

<https://www.youtube.com/@CenterforJewishHistoryNYC>

Genealogy Coffee Break - https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K. The Center for Jewish History's Genealogy Institute presents monthly short talks with an expert librarian on a broad range of topics. Some examples are:

NYC Orphanage Records

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quuYXlgnAk4&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=3

Intro to Online Research at the Center for Jewish History

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI5_15kGvb8&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=5

Research Your Ancestors Town

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALNnA3KoUu8&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=8

Landsmanshaftn Collection

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CKFYoVBRQw&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=13

Finding Your Elusive Female Ancestors

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z63QTcE1kSQ&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=15

Identifying Different Languages and Alphabets

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv9BJOqK8Bg&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=16

Deciphering Handwritten Documents

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP8H6bm5dhU&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=17

Jewish Cemeteries and Gravestones

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMnCJfTI5KI&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=18

Yizkor (Memorial) Books

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR3pvkOpaJg&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=21

Online Resources for Understanding your DNA Test Results

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsHdiGujTCU&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=23

Town Names and Old Maps!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zU4YCQVLMQI&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=29

What's in a Name? A short history of Jewish last names

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeNhmF2E4T0&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=31

Books About Towns

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNGnIRJhVNg&list=PLdXJlaq_fr1bzWVzZFXm-syaq-Bq0qp3K&index=32

NJSNY Meeting Podcast: Beyond the Manifest: Applying Genealogical Proof Standards

<https://jgsny.org/meetings/podcast-category-blog-2/314-garber-20171029> (Emily Garber, 29 October 2017)

JGSNY Meeting Podcast: Using Family Search for Jewish Research

<https://jgsny.org/meetings/podcast-category-blog-2/319-20190428-todd-knowles> (Todd Knowles, 28 April 2019)